

THE

# HISTORIAN

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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

*Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi*

JANUARY 1998

## JANUARY HAPPENINGS

The January luncheon meeting of the Hancock County Historical Society will be held at noon on Thursday, January 15 at the Kate Lobrano House, 108 Cue Street, Bay Saint Louis.

Our speaker will be Mack Herring who is a retired public affairs officer and historian for NASA. He was graduated from the University of Alabama with a major in journalism and creative writing.

Mr. Herring has published a 454 page documented history of the Stennis Space Center and its relationship to the community, the state and the nation's space program. He is currently working on a new book.

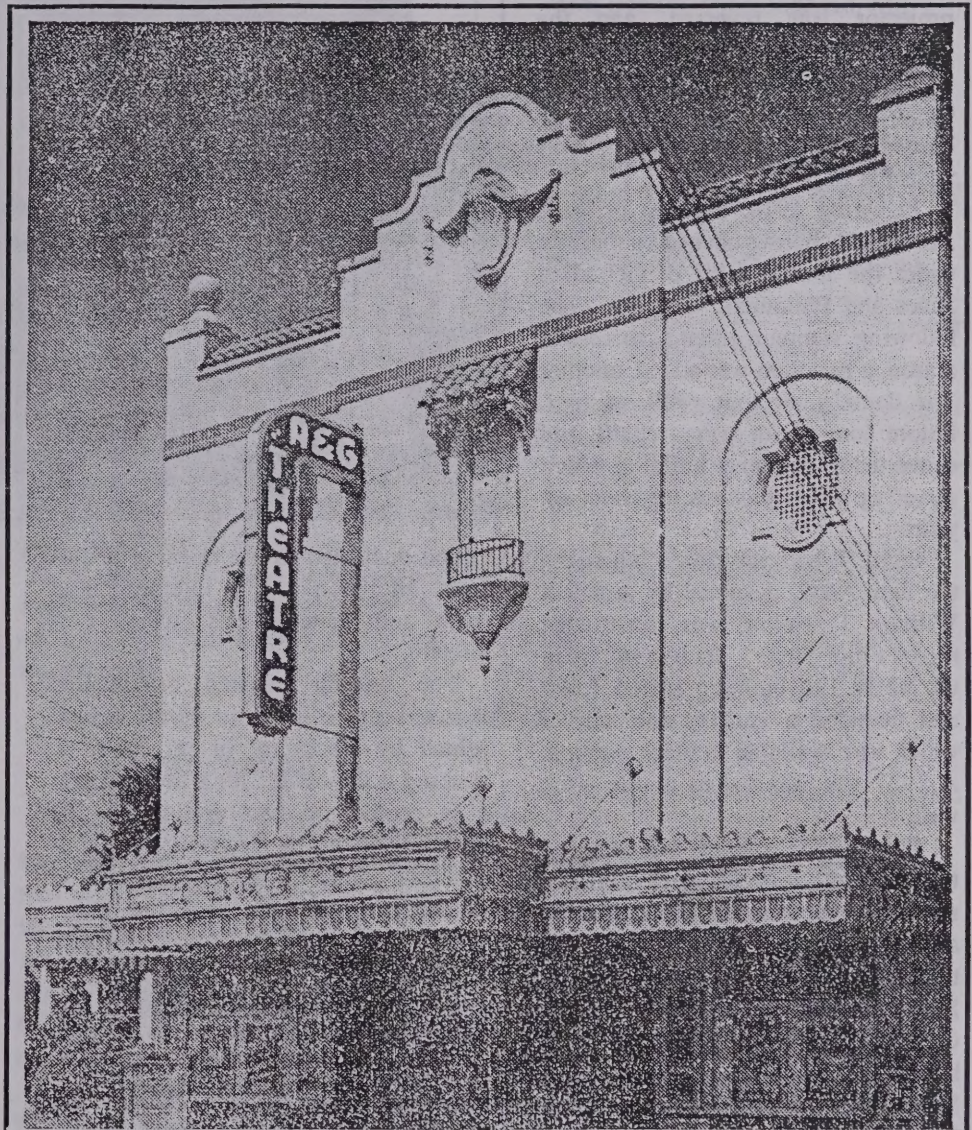
Please call 467-4090 for luncheon reservations at \$6.00. Call early to assure your reservation as we expect this to be a very popular subject. Non-members or non-diners are always welcome.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Thank you for a wonderful year filled with accomplishments that have far exceeded our expectations. Our growth in membership, acquisition of equipment and improvements in facilities is laudable. These things, though important in themselves, are made even more so because they provide the base for the things we will do in 1998.

With the approach of our Tercentenary celebration many opportunities will present themselves, reluctantly or otherwise, and they will be tended in their turn in 1998 so that 1999 will be a great festival. This is the only time we will ever be able to celebrate our 300th anniversary.

(continued on page 3)



A&G THEATER BUILDING BUILT IN 1927

## THE BAY'S EARLY MOVIE HOUSES

Our first picture show was Bay Pictorium, opened in 1905 on the water side

of Front Street, now Beach Boulevard, opposite today's State Street. Its owner/operator, W. A. Sigerson, advertised "A change of moving pictures daily,



beautiful illustrated song, a first class electric theatre with admission of a nickel but on vaudeville nights, admission of a dime." On Wednesdays and Saturdays candy was given away.

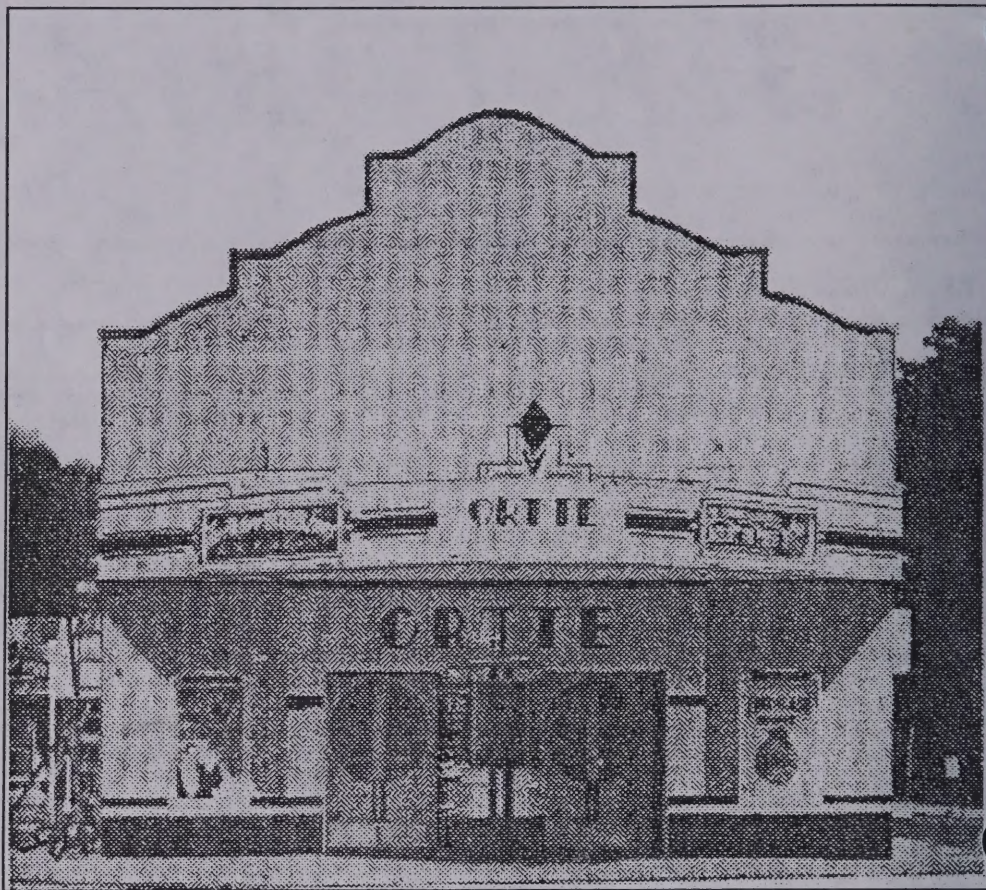
Bay Pictorium had an air dome built over the water and people sat on bleachers out in the open. The management furnished an insect repellent called Sweet Dreams. In case of rain, patrons moved inside, the projector was reversed, and the Keystone Cops didn't miss a beat.

Sigerson sold Bay Pictorium to Octave Fayard who operated in until it burned in 1913. The building was valued at \$2,700.

In spring 1914, the first of three A&G movie houses opened on that site under the management of Geraldine Ames and Philomene Gaspard. The following summer, after a successful season, a pavillion was added, another "air dome" without walls or roof. Before long, both were rebuilt and converted to one large building which served up silent pictures for about six years.

In 1927 the brick building housing the new A&G, designed by architect William T. Nolan, was constructed across Front Street. Its two stories in the 42 X 126 building seated 1,000 and included a gallery, one half of which was available to black patrons. A 1927 fire was halted at the brick wall.

The A&G, vacant and unused today except for occasional vendors of snowballs from the old ticket office, is a piece of local history designated in the National Register of Historic Places as follows: "1927. Spanish Colonial Revival. One-story brick building with 2-story false front. Shaped and stepped parapet with ball finials. Recessed central entrance." The parapet housed the broad copper marquee lighted by electricity "and protecting its patrons against inclement weather conditions, at all times permitting them to drive up in their automobiles beneath its bounteous shade," said an admiring Sea Coast Echo reporter in the special



edition dedicated to the opening of this grand attraction at the intersection of Front and State streets, which cost \$60,000.

The interior boasted ornamented plaster, beam ceilings in barrel design, lighted by electricity in set conduits, "making it impossible for a fire to occur. It is cooled by two arctic new air machines driven by electric motors thus providing comfort to the patrons even in the hottest seasons," said the Echo. A&G's first operator was Richard Boudreaux; its organist Mrs R. Bleu.

So enamored was the Echo of this bright new addition to the community that it dubbed the A&G "a thing of beauty and a joy forever," perhaps not what the poet Keats had in mind.

The Bay's other picture show was the Ortee, opened in the mid-1940s in a building on Beach Boulevard at Washington Street that housed a number of famous establishments in its day.

Originally August Keller's dry goods store built in 1894 after a fire destroyed his earlier store, the structure was bought

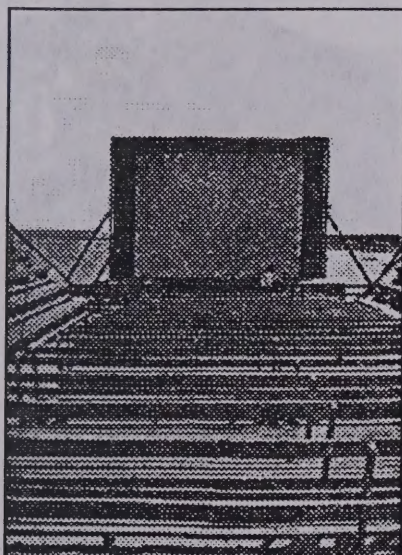
in 1921 by the group that re-organized the Bay-Waveland Yacht Club. The club floundered after a couple of years until its leaders staged a dance in the building in 1930, inspiring one of its members, Charles A. Breath, Sr. to acquire the building for a night club.

In the 'thirties, Keller's old store became Uncle Charlie's Night Club, a lively gathering place in front of which yacht races were held.

In the mid 1940s, Ed Ortee, who owned several movie houses, bought the building and opened the Ortee Theatre, which operated until 1955 when Joseph Scafield bought it and changed its name to the Star.

The Star changed hands in 1975 when Kelvin Schultz bought it and continued to show films and stage community theater plays until 1984. Mr. Schultz, who operates Big E Grocery in part of the building, recently said that he has hopes of restoring the theater area and presenting films and live entertainment again. Edith Back





THE BAY PICTORIUM 1905

**PRESIDENT from page 1**

The actual festivities will begin on February 10, 1999 marking the arrival of Iberville and Bienville at Ship Island and will continue on a near-daily basis following their explorations throughout the year. The most important date to Hancock County will be August 25, the day on which they explored and named the Bay of Saint Louis.

Do not let the fact that we have a year and a month to prepare lull you into complacency. There is much to be done and your help is needed. We expect national, even worldwide publicity for this party so let us be ready.

As I began this article, so would I like to end it, by saying thank you for the incredible support you have given to our work this year. Being president of this society has been a great joy and pleasure.

Charles H. Gray

**DUES**

In order to simplify bookkeeping for our ever-growing membership we have tried to schedule memberships to expire at the end of December each year with dues being due in January. It is now January.

Beginning with this issue of the "HISTORIAN" the address label will show the expiration date of your membership. For your convenience we will enclose a pre-addressed envelope with this mailing. We appreciate your prompt payment because it will help us prepare our budget for the year.

If the date on your label does not agree with your records, please call the office and we will correct our records immediately.

**TRUST FUND**

We have closed the financial books for 1997 and are happy to report that we are happy. The Society has no indebtedness to bring forward to 1998. All construction, electrical, plumbing and furnishings bills have been paid in full. In fact, all obligations of the Society are now purely social.

Additionally, we have restored the money which we had borrowed from our Trust account when the new addition was being built. The Trust fund was accumulated from donations either in memory of someone or as a personal gift by someone who designated it to that purpose. That fund now has about \$2,500.00.

**NEW MEMBERS**

Ethel Osoinach Smith, New Orleans, LA  
 Mrs. Jeanne Bonck, Pass Christian  
 Donald Cue, Jr. Rancho Cucamonga, CA  
 Stacey Cue, Rancho Cucamonga, CA  
 Richard Gatti, Naples, FL  
 Nanette Arceneaux Gatti, Naples, FL  
 Richard Smith, Bay St. Louis, MS  
 Dorothea Smith, Bay St. Louis, MS  
 Mrs. Helen Henrie, Diamondhead, MS  
 Janet Bonura, Diamondhead, MS  
 Rosadel Fryer, Diamondhead, MS  
 Luke Saucier, Santa Rosa Beach, FL  
 Mrs. Luke Saucier, Santa Rosa Beach, FL  
 Vivian Ramsay, Bay St. Louis, MS  
 Margarite Edwards, Diamondhead, MS  
 Mrs. Armand (Bessie) Jonte, Waveland, MS  
 Gloria Jones, Bay St. Louis, MS  
 Ms. Ileana Luke, Bay St. Louis, MS

**Word of Wisdom**

Uncomfortable shoes will take your mind off just about anything else.

**LOBRANO HOUSE HOURS**

MONDAY	8 a.m.
through	to
FRIDAY	4 p.m.

**THE****HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

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 Editor

Charles H. Gray  
 Edith Back

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## The Mauffray-Thompson House

600 North Beach Boulevard  
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Residence Ca. 1925 Colonial revival.

Two story 5x2-bay gabled-roof stucco house with central entrance and 1-story projecting porch. Casement windows. Lattice between columns.

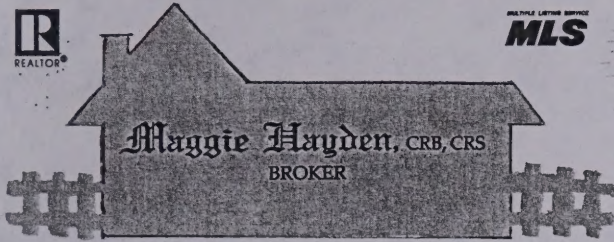
Restored in 1997 by Mrs. Gretchen Thompson.



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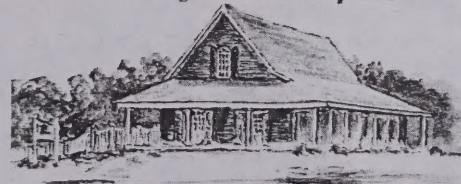
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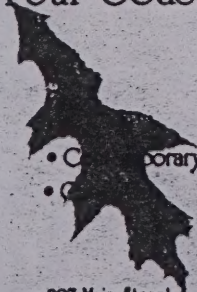
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